

Summit of Substance

The second summit meeting of the Developing-8 (D-8) group of Muslim countries which begins in Dhaka today may be wearing a rather depleted look, but its potential nevertheless remains strong. The inability of heads of government of four member-states - Nigeria, Egypt, Indonesia and Iran - to attend the summit has robbed the meeting of much of its lustre. But the presence of Suleyman Demirel of Turkey, Mahathir Mohammad of Malaysia and Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan will ensure that the summit reflects concerns and aspirations of the D-8 as a whole, which represents nearly 800 million people of the developing world. Although the eight members are certainly disparate in many respects, the blend of economic achievement, cultural advancement, democratic practices and large populations makes it a potentially formidable player on the global political arena. However, despite the political flavour, the focus of the D-8 is likely to remain on economic and development issues.

The agenda for the D-8 was drawn up nearly two years ago when the bloc was launched in Istanbul in June 1997. The members had then identified 13 key areas, ranging from rural development to trade and industry, where they could play significant roles in enhancing one another's capacity through sharing of expertise and experiences. The D-8 members are well placed to address these issues from their own experiences and chalk out a path for others. However, there is one handicap. The bloc is geographically dispersed, which makes it an unlikely grouping of trading partners.

The real potential of the D-8, however, is far greater than the current agenda would suggest. While the formation of a trading bloc can be the longer term goal, the immediate task would be to take a global view, particularly the effect of the globalisation process triggered by liberalisation of trade, finance, capital markets etc. The D-8 can use the considerable intellectual resources and political weight of member-states to formulate positions on trade, financial liberalisation, capital movement etc., which would protect the interests of the developing world. The developing world needs to attract foreign capital to help industrialise their economies, but they also need protection from operations of currency and stock speculators. The D-8 is in a sound position to play an important role on both counts.

The Deadly Inferno

Wisemen say never underestimate the power of fire, enemy and disease, however small they may appear at the outset. So don't allow them to grow; don't allow them time to flourish and spread. The period for devastation by fire generally spreads over the Bangla months of Falgun, Chaitra and Baishakh, which means we are caught in the middle of it. The dry season is always the most dangerous time for fire-related loss of life and property.

On Saturday we had a tragic incident of fire in which at least six precious lives were lost. The number may increase and the loss of property has already been estimated to be crores of taka. Perhaps this will not be the last of its kind this season and we are afraid of further damages to life and property. Haphazard growth of shanties in and around Dhaka has posed health and other social problems to the metropolis but these are the places where bulk of the lower income group live with their near and dear ones. These shanties are normally constructed over government lands, but neither by the owner of the land nor by the residents. These are mainly built by land grabbers and mafias of the area, often backed by political muscle, and then rented out. Neither the government agencies nor the local leaders step in; in fact their tacit support emboldens these anti-social elements to indulge in such illegal activities. There are allegations that often the owners themselves set fire to such bustees to settle scores with other owners. The residents are used as vote banks during elections by political leaders but at times of distress they are neglected by these selfish leaders.

We sympathise with the fire victims of BNP Bazar shanties and urge upon local leaders and government and non-government agencies to come forward with help, both in cash and kind, for them.

Chilling Insecurity for Girls

Rogues are stopping short at nothing to get a hand on helpless girls once their eyes have fallen on them. Two recent incidents reported from Faridpur town and Poba thana in Rajshahi district not merely confirm such an impression but also go far beyond that as a virtual indictment on the over-all law and order situation in the country. In the Faridpur incident some masked thugs claiming to be policemen had the door to a house opened at 2 am and fell upon college girl Sheuli to drag her out in a desperado-style abduction bid. When she was desperately clinging on to her aunt's body the rogues nudged her at gun-point and then opened fire killing her. Her brother sustained injuries while her father, the headmaster of a primary school, looked helplessly on. The brutal death of the meritorious college girl triggered waves of protest in the area in which police vehicles were also damaged. They demanded justice. The police have arrested a tempo driver on suspicion. The law enforcement agencies have not only to ferret out the culprits but ensure that they are punished in the end with a deterrent effect.

In the case of Rajshahi there was even a more abominable mix of things. Here a school girl was reportedly stripped naked, raped and then her photographs were taken to blackmail her family. The duo who did it all are said to be the sons of two local heavy-weights. It is only under pressure from newsmen that the OC, Poba thana took up the case after 12 days of dithering, so reported a prominent Bangla daily. The culprits are known elements. The local authorities cannot afford to let them off under any circumstances. It is only when such goons go unpunished that they return with greater tyranny to make worse havoc of life.

The Lahore Declaration

An Efflorescent Spring or Springtime Flirtation?

This is the symbol of peace and security that should be aimed at unless the parties concerned would like only to be guided by the experiences. The foggy stipulations of the Lahore Declaration are not enough to understand their motives. Much would depend on how these stipulations would be translated on the ground defying the monstrous forces raising their ugly heads on either side of Indo-Pakistan border.

THE Indo-Pakistan relation has again hit the headlines with the world attention focused on the high drama surrounding the Lahore Declaration - a high point in an effort for friendship between two countries. In an extraordinary move in bilateral diplomacy the Indian prime minister availed on February 19 the inaugural trip of the newly introduced bus service between New Delhi and Lahore to visit Pakistan for the first such visit in last ten years. When Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee crossed the international border at Wagha Checkpost, his Pakistani counterpart, a beaming Mr Nawaz Sharif, accorded him a red carpet reception in a rare gesture of conciliation. Later after a summit meeting in Lahore they both crafted a joint declaration - the best since Shimla Agreement twenty-eight years ago. Among other things they vowed to reduce the risk of an accidental nuclear war, promised to give early warning of ballistic missile tests and wanted to intensify efforts to resolve all issues with regards to Kashmir. Mr Sharif called the meeting 'significant' and ice breaking while Mr Vajpayee saw the event as a 'defining moment' in South Asia's history. But, apart from rhetorics as well as gloss and glitter of the ceremony, the summit produced, at best, a cautious optimism, let alone a sense of euphoria that usually accompanies such momentous events. While speculations abounded about the summit's fall out on the region's peace and security, observers both at home and abroad, looked askance if the subcontinent's two arch rivals would finally be able to bury the hatchets.

The apprehensions are not entirely without reasons. Any effort to promote friendship between the estranged neighbours has been seldom smooth. Even the current phase of dialogue between India and Pakistan, which started, after years of stalemate, from the 1997 MAARC Summit suffered several jolts and was, at times, relegated to backburner. In the meantime, the subcontinent's geopolitical landscape was drastically transformed with its nuclearisation and the new areas of tensions surfaced. Less than a year before Pakistan's foreign minister told in the wake of Ghous's test firing that

his Indian counterpart to avail the first bus to visit Pakistan, it grows out of new acquired self assurance.

But the problem that proved more nagging for India is a constant pressure from external governments who are genuinely worried over looming nuclear danger in the subcontinent to settle the issue of Kashmir with its nuclear rival, Pakistan. For a decade Kashmir is in thrives of militancy seeking end of its tenuous link with New Delhi. India finds the occupation of the state with no less than half a million troops rather expensive, yet for her Kashmir is hardly negotiable because she considers the state an integral

presupposes the presence of credible Confidence Building Measures (CBM) as well as adequate command and control mechanism which have not developed between these countries. So the acquisition of nuclear devices is by itself fraught with grave danger because the devices can be used under temptation, through miscalculation and by accident or mistake. Once the euphoria of attaining nuclear status was over, the leadership in both the countries could not anymore be oblivious of its accompanying dangers. It is not thus surprising that the stipulations of the Lahore Declaration specifically address the problem.

the reaction to sanction in Pakistan where the foreign exchange reserves has dwindled down to barely \$1bn is strangely fatalistic. Pakistan however admits that it has neither the resources nor the staying power to meet the challenge of the sanction. But the Pakistanis candidly argue that the country's economic situation was bad anyway also before the nuclear test. The feeling of financial insecurity has brought the Pakistan currency and share market tumbling down. Pakistanis desperately hope that the sanction should be lifted soon and the Americans would not let them down. Their consolation is: they turn to Arab world for help. India cannot.

Pakistan's strongest urge for peace and amity, however, stems from her enormous internal insecurity and myriad divisive forces at work within the country. The violence, terror and carnage are the order of the day. The internecine strife along ethnic and sectarian lines wreck the society. Pakistan's woes exacerbate with input from across the border.

An exasperated Mr Nawaz Sharif, like his Indian counterpart, wants to set right his domestic order which could not be possible without eliminating outside influence on internal conflicts dynamics of the country concerned. At Lahore both the Prime Minister promised to each other not to interfere in the domestic issues of the neighbour.

Yet, the question why Mr Vajpayee availed the first bus for Pakistan remains a mystery. Perhaps the answer lies in the politics of the sanction. The sanctions imposed on both India and Pakistan remain in effect till the sanctioning countries wish to lift them. There are no specified criteria which must meet for the sanction to be lifted or actions which India and Pakistan could take so that it would lead to an automatic removal of the sanction. The unconditional signing of CTBT and NPT is one such action be-

PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz



part of Indian Union. But the ground realities as well as the past history largely negates Indian claim and its hard stance on Kashmir hardly yielded anything positive for India. There are, of late, also internal dissent as regards India's policy towards the disputed state. As a result the Indian leadership may now reconsider its position on Kashmir in the light of changed situation both internally and externally. Before Mr IK Gujral agreed at Male in 1997 to include Kashmir in the agenda of dialogue, the subject had been a taboo in the bilateral interlocution. The stipulations of Lahore Declaration re-confirmed its importance and unavailability in any future talk, notwithstanding the bleak prospect of its making any headway.

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But the most compelling factor behind the rapprochement could not but be the sanction induced economic recession in both the countries. From the beginning, India underplayed the impact of the sanction and her finance minister called it only 'minor road block'. But, as a matter of fact, India has started feeling the crunch after the US and Japan have suspended their direct aid payment and cut their large assistance programme. So far direct US aid to India amounted to \$50bn, the bulk of which went to the government. Last year alone Japanese aid to India totalled Y136.50bn in loans and grants which was nearly half of India's foreign aid. Sanctions of the World Bank are modest but they hit where they hurt most affecting the infrastructural projects such as power, telecom, roads, ports and construction industries. As the Indians grudgingly suffer from their economic woes their only consolation is that they are better off than the Pakistanis. On the other hand,

part of Indian Union. But the ground realities as well as the past history largely negates Indian claim and its hard stance on Kashmir hardly yielded anything positive for India. There are, of late, also internal dissent as regards India's policy towards the disputed state. As a result the Indian leadership may now reconsider its position on Kashmir in the light of changed situation both internally and externally. Before Mr IK Gujral agreed at Male in 1997 to include Kashmir in the agenda of dialogue, the subject had been a taboo in the bilateral interlocution. The stipulations of Lahore Declaration re-confirmed its importance and unavailability in any future talk, notwithstanding the bleak prospect of its making any headway.

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was in no mood to accommodate the request of the government at such a late stage and given the history of misuse of 'the doctrine of necessity' in Pakistan.

In giving its judgement the SC went strictly according to the merit of the Constitution in establishing that the laws of the land are to be interpreted only by the SC and that any track that leads a person to the finality of death must have recourse to appeal and review by the SC, the focal point of check and balance in the State, the other two pillars being the Executive and Parliament. In the circumstances the SC had no option but to give the judgement it did, qualifying it Solomon-like as much as it could because of the bad security environment. In essence, the Honourable judges bent over backwards without compromising their credibility and conscience that requires them to uphold the Constitution and its interpretations thereof to the exclusion of every other consideration. The rule of law must prevail in a civilised society, the SC in Pakistan has simply ensured that - or has it?

Because of the incompetence and negligence of the government's legal eagles, the prime sufferers are (1) The Federation of Pakistan (2) The Government of Sindh (3) The Army and not the least (4) the people of Pakistan, in particularly those of Sindh. The judges manning the ATCs are human beings, so are the prosecutors and the witnesses. With threats and other means of intimidation, an environment of terror had ensured that very few cases were

brought to trial and if they were, the 'lack' of evidence meant that the perpetrators of atrocities walked free.

Notwithstanding the correct logic behind the ruling of the SC, the landmark judgement has been greeted with general dismay by the man in the street in Karachi. An air of apprehension hangs over the city, almost like a suspended Sword of Damocles, as the population waits for the forces of evil to take advantage and strike back.

As militants again take to guns and the economy is shattered by the crossfire, the ultimate loss will be that of the Federation as the fragile unity will again be threatened. Struggling with separatism in the ru-

ral areas in the '80s, the Province of Sindh is seeing greater impediments as separatism rears its ugly head in the urban areas, albeit in the minds of a few people with vested interests. Rather than development what we have seen in the past two decades is the erosion of the socio-economic infra-structure. The worst affected, economically and emotionally, have been the people of Sindh, in particular of Karachi. Is the SC's ruling going to make the situation better or worse?

While upholding the rule of law, the SC has inadvertently put the forces upholding the rule of law in jeopardy in two ways, viz (1) the LEAs operating in Karachi and Sindh at great

The threat of ATCs had driven the cohorts underground, the psychological effect had been to strike the fear of God among them, the net result was a cessation of terrorist activity across the length and breadth of the city and the Province. There is real fear among the masses that peace and harmony in the city will be soon over as the militants re-discover their 'courage' and again make the city hostage to their demands.

The Federation suffers because Karachi is also the only port of Pakistan and the economy is almost totally dependent on its smooth functioning. Because the threat of force is always a greater deterrent as compared to once force is used, the fear of ATCs has eliminated

ever have come across in Europe would ever think of wearing any such kind of 'see-through' clothes.

Therefore, by publishing these kind of pictures, you do give a thoroughly wrong impression about what women really wear in the West, and this would surely be one more way for our people here to once again look down upon the already generally 'discredited' morals of the West.

Of course, there are good things and bad things everywhere. If I may for instance point out what 'freedom of democracy' means in the East and in the West. For instance, democracy in the East means, 'I am free, I can do anything and everything I like.' I can go through the red-light of the installed traffic lights with impunity. I can throw away any kind of useless bits of paper or banana peels etc anywhere at any place. I can obstruct the sidewalks, park the car anywhere I like, I can cheat anyone at any time and also demand undue money for services, etc.

And what does democracy mean in the West? It means, that every kind of freedom involves the utter responsibility of obeying the rules and regulations that allow a disciplined life in the society.

What I really mean by this is, that we should always try to

rather propagate the good of the others, and certainly avoid to unnecessarily create false impressions of the West - or of the AL to remain 'sober'.

Kamaluddin Ahmed
University of Chittagong
Chittagong

I feel disturbed

Sir, Every time I see in your esteemed paper one of those pictures of those 'famous fashion designers' from Europe, paraded by those 'unfortunate fashion models', I feel deeply disturbed, wondering what the object is to publish these kind of 'latest news'. Again there was that picture in your paper of F3, with the caption: 'A model presents a black underwear ensemble with a black Muslim veil by French fashion house Rosy at the four-day International Underwear Fair in Paris Friday - AP/UNB photo'.

Well, this being an underwear, it would of course expose the body to some extent. However, I would like to inform the readers, regarding all the previous publications of those impossible 'see-through' fashions sometimes almost exposing the body from top to bottom, which would indicate that western ladies wore those with impunity, that nobody whom I

scale of provincial services were much lower. Their pay scale was Tk 375-35-1050 whereas that of central services were Tk 450-50-1000. It took them nearly three years to reach the initial pay of central service officers. Most of the provincial service officers could not even qualify in the written test of Central Superior Service Exam.

But now they are being promoted to positions far beyond their wildest dreams. Because of their domination in secretariat they are manipulating seniority list to their hearts content. At the moment promotion to the post of additional secretary is being made on the basis of recommendation of Akram Committee.

Some, though not full, justice can even now be done to all the constituent cadres by fixing their seniority on the basis of BCS Seniority Rules, 1978 which clearly states that inter-seniority of cadre services will be fixed on the basis of their promotion to senior scale. When senior service pool was constituted, erstwhile central cadres were granted three-year seniority over provincial cadres. Any impartial observer will admit that central service officers are head and shoulder above the provincial service officers so far education, out look and efficiency are concerned. Even pay

liametary Committee on service matters. But the Committee too have not taken any real interest and initiative to sort out the problem.

Mrs. Moni Jahan
Dhaka.

Don't tell me I'm wrong

Sir, Two things. Firstly, what was reported what Kapil said, he should be supported by the media and be driven in to being in charge and the head of cricket, the current system is ridiculous. Secondly, Nehru has been given the chance to replace Srinath. I agree totally with playing a left-arm bowler, it will create rough for the spinners and also Sri Lanka have a lot of left handed batsmen. Someone please tell me that Nehru was picked because Ramkissen was injured. Because otherwise there is no way on current performance he could get the nod ahead. If he was intentionally picked ahead of him and there is nothing wrong with Ramkissen, then that selector should get sacked. He has earned his chance.

Sunil
UK

To the Editor...

Sobriety

Sir, Immediately after the publication of a commentary by Mahfuz Anam on the senseless strife, there was a practical demonstration of what BNP's sobriety is! In the language of The Daily Star: "A group of about 20 these pickets (BNP, pickets) ... started to push the autorickshaw away from the gate of The Daily Star office. Then about three boys set it alight."

Is it the characteristic of a party that is sober, 'rational' (!). Mr. Latif Sarkar from Japan has already given a detailed picture of BNP as a sober? political party. Now my question is: why (according to Mr. Anam) AL has lost its sober image? Was there any pertinent reason for this? After the brutal killing of its founding leader AL was suppressed by almost all the forces belonging to the anti-AL camp. I still remember how the food prepared for the destitutes on the 15 August was snatched away and even destroyed and how the celebrants of the national mourning day was threatened with bombs and arms. I still preserve the picture of one of the self-proclaimed killers of Bangabandhu, aiming a gun at the crowd in front of the Press Club. For the last 21 years AL had to digest lots of in-

stances of this kind of 'sobriety' from the BNP, JP, Freedom Party, Jamaat and the like. And it was really an impossible for the AL to remain 'sober'.

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